THE GLOBE AND MAIL

HD **Greta Thunberg blasts COP26 as a 'greenwash festival' for wealthy countries**

BY Paul Waldie
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Huge Fridays for Future demonstration in Glasgow creates a festive atmosphere with a serious message that some Canadian delegates came to hear

Environmental activist Greta Thunberg led thousands of young people through the streets of Glasgow on Friday and then delivered a withering criticism of the COP26 climate conference during a downtown rally.

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"It is not a secret that COP26 is a failure. It should be obvious that we cannot solve a crisis with the same methods that got us into it in the first place," Ms. Thunberg told the crowd.

She went on to accuse world leaders and business executives of "actively creating loopholes and shaping frameworks to benefit themselves." The entire conference, she added, had turned into a "greenwash festival" for wealthy countries and a "two-week-long celebration of business as usual and blah, blah, blah."

The march has been the largest public event during COP26 so far and it put a spotlight on a youth movement that Ms. Thunberg, 18, has inspired - and that world leaders have found hard to ignore. Several other young campaigners also spoke at the rally and they all echoed her bleak assessment of the climate summit. "Once again we are faced with another COP event. How many more of these should they hold until they realize that their inactions are destroying the planet?" Vanessa Nakate, a climate activist from Uganda said to the protesters.

Many of those marching came because of Ms. Thunberg and the organization she helped found, called Fridays for Future. It grew out of a climate protest she staged in front of the Swedish parliament in 2018, which became a global sensation and prompted children around the world to go on similar strikes every Friday.

"Greta really has started a huge movement," said Glenn Wright, a farmer from Saskatchewan who joined the march with his wife, Shannon. "They are getting more attention now than any of the other activists."

The Wrights are attending COP26 as part of a delegation from the National Farmers Union, but they left the conference to walk with the demonstrators. Ms. Wright said they'd drawn inspiration from their two children. "It's about the future and that's what our kids represent," she said. "That's why we're here for sure."

Aside from the angry speeches, the march had a festival-like atmosphere, and there were plenty of young children, and families pushing baby carriages. At one point along the procession a group of about two dozen elementary-school children held up handmade signs and chanted, "Stop climate change."

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"This is a really powerful show of the people's fight for climate justice," said Aliya Hirji, a high-school student from Toronto and a member of Fridays for Future in Canada. "As a young person I'm always trying to remain optimistic and hopeful. This is my future on the line. I can't resort to feeling a sense of doom because then I won't act. But it's really hard."

Ms. Hirji has been an observer at COP26 this week, and she has found the experience frustrating. "I've been blocked from a lot of rooms," she said. "I've had world leaders just turn their backs on me and walk away as I'm trying speak. It's been really frustrating. It's hard to expect an equitable outcome when COP itself is inequitable."

Joining the march as well was Sadie Vipond, a 15-year-old student from Calgary who has been involved in a lawsuit against the federal government over climate change. The suit alleges Ottawa has failed to adequately protect the future of young Canadians. The group suffered a setback recently when a judge dismissed the case because it was too broad. However, Ms. Vipond said they've filed an appeal.

"We're suing them because they have not adequately done enough to protect youth against the effects of climate change," she explained as she lined up for the march with her father, Joe Vipond. "Everyone involved in the case has been affected by climate change. Personally, I was evacuated due to the 2013 Calgary flood. And the smoke that drifts over Calgary every summer is very detrimental. Basically we are asking for a science-based recovery plan."

As the demonstrators reached George Square in the heart of Glasgow, hundreds more people gathered for the rally. Among them was Alexa Waud, a Canadian who works with a London-based non-profit group called the Democratic Society, which campaigns for social-justice causes.

"It's an exciting moment in the climate movement," Ms. Waud said as she watched the rally. "Activists from around the world are coming together and showing what a global movement can look like. So regardless of what's happening, there will be a stronger movement demanding accountability."

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